Route 12 - Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21701

January 25, 1978

Mr. Grant Dillman
United Press International
National Press Building
Washington, D.C. 20000

Dear Mr. Dillman:

Ordinarily, a news story and its antecedents are matters between reporters, editors and their collective consciences, if any.

Customarily, I ignore most erroneous reporting in the areas of my expertise, political assassinations, even if I am attracted to them by error. Error has become the norm of American journalism on the subject.

However, I believe your story headed, "Files Show FBI Concluded Ray Financed Escape by Stealing" in this morning's Post is an exception. It is unfair. It is in serious factual errof. UPI should have known and done better. It is hurtful to me and it is a cover-the-FBI-ass piece.

I would like you to believe that I write in your inteeest as well as my own.

Your personal interest and that of UPI like in the fact that you have just given international attention to what amounts to official propaganda.

Typifying all these and other journalistic flaws I am willing to enumerate if you would like is the sentence, "The FBI reports - made available exclusively to UPI under the Freedom of Information Act - also showed a strong streak of racism and pro-Nazi feelings may have led Ray to assassinate" Dr. King.

It is false to say that these records were made available to UPI exclusively. It also is false to state that you obtained them under the Freedom of Information Act even if you did request them under that Act.

I am responsible for making these records available and UPI has known this for more than two years. In fact, UPI covered and reported the first news conference I held to give away to everyone who wanted them copies of the first records I obtained.

Prior to that I discussed my FOIA efforts with your Ed Rodgers, who I believe covered the Department of Justice for you. I also made available to him unpublished and completely factual information on the King case. This information did not please the Department of Justice. If Rodgers wrote such a story, the UPI did not distribute it. In this I am suggesting a less than impartial reportorial attitude.

You have personal knowledge of my availability to UPI on any assassination stories if it wants a nongovernment source with which to hheck. If you had done what on other topics is normal checking, you would have been less of an unofficial official spokesman. In less diplomatic language, you would have avoided becoming a propagandist for errant government and you would not have engaged in wholesale misinformation and disinformation.

If you would like to deteemine for yourself the magnitude of the injustice to me in this dishonest reporting, there is an easy and an independent means available to you: consult the court records you have so consistently ignored in this and other assassination FOIA cases. Your courthouse reporter of such selective interests can do this easily by consulting the docket entries in my C.A. 75-1996. If you want to go further, get a copy of the docket and ask your own counsel to give

you an estimate of the costs in time and cash the docket entries alone suggest.

Of course, whether or not it is UPI's intent, ignoring all the FOIA work done by others enables UPI to come along, duplicate the requests, accept official guidance on the meaning of the records credted by those officials, and then to toot UPI's own horn on its own wire.

My effort in this case goes back to March 1969 when I started what is not yet complete after something close to two dozen court hearings over the past two years. If your reporter did really go over the records now available because of me, it is not possible to have missed this or the Hoover instructions that the law be violated and my FOIA requests be ignored - two dozen of them on the JFK assassination alone.

What I, not you, have made available also represents an enormous effort by my lawyer, Jim Lesar, in whose home your Ed Rodgers met with me soon after we commenced this case that has been in court for so long. I have not been able to pay my lawyer because I do this work without income or subsidy.

UPI also knew in advance of the most recent of my JFK records suits under FOIA because it received written notification. I saw no UPI reporting to I enclose a copy of the Post's story.

When you decided to ignore that story, it enabled you to pretend that UPI does work it really does not do - and to claim the work of others as its own.

It is out-add-out dishonesty to state no more than that "The FBI reports ... also showed a strong streak of racism and pro-Nazi feelings" by James Earl Ray. Those same records also clearly establish that most of the FBI's sources for these reports lacked any credibility. In addition, those same records, including interviews with blacks, state exactly the opposite.

I know the volume of those records not only because I am the one who shook them loose but because I have read each and every one of them. From this I know that you were not about to pay a reporter for the time required to read more paper than is required for earning a doctoral degree.

Whether Ray is or is not a racist is not the question. UPI's honesty in its reporting is the question because it failed even to indicate that there is any basis for an opinion other than the official opinion UPI parroted.

You also beg the question of Ray's financing by an aftificial limitation to his flight from Memphis. This is not what bugged the FBI at all. Its real problem was to be able to satisfy others of its own preconception of Ray's lone guilt, yet it was not able to pin a single robbery on him or account for a single penny he had from the time he escaped from the Missouri pen until after Dr. King was killed. (On that petty bank heist in England you failed to tell your international audience how much it yielded or how irrelevant it was to his flight from Memphis.)

The FBI broke its back to see if it could pin a single unsolved crime on him. It failed, totally. It and you fail to account for how Ray bought several autos, made two trips to Canada, including taking a resort vacation there, luxuriated (for him) in Mexico and Los Angeles for several months and crisscrossed the United Statess without holding a single job until after the King assassination. He was then a dishwasher for a short period of time.

"The FBI concluded" that Ray kept going on crimes is your lead. The same FBI also "concluded" that Dr. King was a dangerous red radical and the country's biggest liar. You appear to be selective in those FBI "conclusions" you accept and retail unquestioningly.

Whether or not you are aware of it, in recent months you have gone into the Mark Lane business. I hope you now have had enough experience in this business to practice the traditional journalistic cautions when in the future you report official acts, statements and records.

I have great difficulty believing that UPI set out to commit all these sins or was able to commit all of them and others without a little help. I therefore ask you what I have never asked any reporter, an account of how all this happened.

I do have this case still in court.

The forecast of what you have just done to me is in the case records. My lawyer alleged it would be inevitable because of the official stonewalling. Independently, the judge made comment along those lines. (I have most of the transcripts and you are welcome to examine them.) This is not new within my long experience in trying to end official suppressions. It is the means by which the government, in its last resort, fixes the national mind about the records it is about to have to release.

This also would not be the first time the Department and the bureau pulled this kind of dirty trick on me and on those it used.

In this case the correlation with a possible longing for vengeance over what happened to it in court on January 16, reported in the enclosed story, seems obvious enough.

When this has happened in the past, reporters have voluntarily told me that the request for information was solicited and that their attention was directed.

I do not know many reporters who want to be used by government or who are happy to learn that they have been used.

So I do hope you will be willing to provide me with a history of the FOIA request you report, your basis for selecting the records your story is supposed to report and your basis for claiming an exclusive release to you of records that have been available for so long a time because of me.

I think you can see the damage this kind of unfactual reporting does to me. I would prefer to believe that this is not your personal intention and that UPI is not using this means of seeking favors from the Department and the FBI.

SINCERELY,

HAROLD WEISBERG

Files Show FBI Concluded Ray Financed Escape by Stealing

Post 1/25/78

United Press International

The FBI concluded that James Earl Ray financed his escape from Memphis, Tenn., after killing the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. through a series of petty robberies and was not bankrolled by co conspirators, FBI files disclosed yesterday.

Internal FBI documents, amassed in the largest manhunt in history, disclosed that Ray was planning a flight to South Africa or Rhodesia a few days before his arrest by Scotland Yard police officers at London's Heathrow Airport on June 8, 1968, two months after King was gunned down on a motel balcony in Memphis.

The FBI reports—made available exclusively to UPI under the Freedom of Information Act—also showed a strong streak of racism and pro-Nazi feelings may have led Ray to assassinate the man who most symbolized black refusal to accept anything but equal status in America.

Just a few weeks before King's murder, Ray and a companion, Charles Stein, drove from Los Angeles to New Orleans and back. In the course of that trip, Ray gave vent to his racial feelings.

There has been speculation that Ray, a drifter who had spent most his life in jail, had been bankrolled by forces eager to silence King.

As recently as June 27, 1974, however, the FBI files showed, the bureau concluded it could find "nothing to indicate that Ray ever received any large sum of money from anyone, and what we know of his living habits both before and after the murder would indicate that he lived on a very limited amount of money.

"We do not know the source of even the smallest amount of money possessed by Ray, but since we know him to have robbed a bank in England after fleeing to that country, it is a reasonable presumption that Ray committed robberies in the United States during the time he was a fugitive," the FBI said.